suddenly merge into green as one walked over the sands, and come upon a copse of tamarisk and camel thorn, with moss and grass and occasionally a type of dandelion, growing in their shade.

To obtain a glimpse of this infinite variety of the desert, one should fly over it at two thousand feet. From this height one has an ideal panorama in which are focused mountain peaks of changing colour, shallow seas of pale jade green, and sands that vary from golden yellow to blood red.

My own entry into Arabia was by air. After two days' flight from Poole, with night-stops at Cairo and Bahrein Island, our Short Sunderland flying-boat crossed the Persian Gulf through thundery cumulus clouds and flew three hundred miles direct to Dubai, a busy town ten miles south-west of Sharjah. The mountains suddenly gave way to a long, narrow creek, and we skimmed the low-walled town to make a smooth landing between the marker buoys. From the air the open-roofed houses looked as though they had been bombed, the shadows giving the sharp relief of inked-in squares. The gardens of the merchants were gay with feathery palms, and in the creek and harbour scores of dhows, with awnings of palm-matting, lazily skimmed the surface.

Our four-engined aircraft was speedily moored to the buoy—an operation requiring some dexterity on the part of the first officer, who has to hook the ring at the top of the buoy as the aircraft slowly taxies up to it; if he misses, the flying-boat has to make a second circuit or else taxi to another buoy. The passenger launch was already half-way across the creek, with the sun-bronzed coxswain at the wheel. He was a Scot who had spent two years in the desert and had never had a day's illness. The clean lines and trim condition of the launch were impressive, as were the Arab serangs, clad in blue jerseys and wearing piratical caps, who stood in the stern like guardsmen. The engines were reversed to enable the launch to glide slowly under the wing, and careful hands grasped the flying-boat's hull to prevent bumping. The door was opened and as soon as the traffic officer had clambered aboard with his papers and diplomatic mail, we were ushered aboard the launch. Happily, there were none of the usual port formalities, for at Dubai there are no immigration, customs or passport requirements for air travellers.

As we chugged away from our silver-painted craft towards the tiny stone pier, I felt that we had suddenly drifted into another world —a world of azure, cloudless skies, pellucid green water, and soft,

[Shi'hou]

563 The situation was getting a little out of hand. I seized Stanton
609 by the arm and urged him back towards the crevice up which we had come. Hardly had we reached the end of the valley when a dozen emaciated Arabs, with long beards, and rifles in their hands, suddenly appeared from behind a row of neam trees. They were slowly moving towards the entrance to the crevice, from which they must have watched us emerge, intent on cutting off our retreat. Before we could draw our revolvers one of them had fired his rifle, the bullet striking the rock cliff behind us.

Stanton yelled and dashed towards a hole in the rocks. We ran like hares to the cave, bullets spattering the rocks all round us, and reached the entrance just in time. We held a brief council of war and decided that, with a dozen rounds each, we could just about hold our own, since the cave was a natural fort and was better suited for defence than for attack. To our consternation the twelve *Shi'hou* were soon joined by about twenty more armed men who began to creep towards our hiding place. We realized that it was useless to try and shoot our way out, and replacing our
142 revolvers in their holsters, awaited the outcome. The *Shi'hou*, who by now stood outside the cave yelling and gesticulating with their rifles, were an extraordinary-looking lot. Shorter than the average Arab, they had a much wilder look, with long hair and beards.
[411] Each man carried a curious little axe, no bigger than a hammer, attached to a long pole. Their faces were rounder and much less Semitic than the Arabs', and of a reddish-brown colour. A few strips of cotton saved them from complete nudity, and their arms and legs were covered with silver rings.

563 The only member of the tribe who wore a head-dress—a strip
609 of dirty white cloth worn in the manner of a turban—stepped forward and spoke to us in the strange dialect of his tribe. I knew some Arabic and recognized one word which, roughly translated, meant 'Come out'. As we left the cave and stood before him they yelled more wildly than before, no doubt demanding our blood as the price of violating the sanctity of their hills. The headman silenced them and began to jabber at us violently, gesticulating fiercely with his hands. After five minutes of this haranguing, he seemed to realize that we did not understand him and glared at us impatiently.

● 486 'What about the *ghuli chit*?' Stanton whispered in my ear, and
563 I suddenly remembered the pass which the Sheikh of Sharjah had provided me with. This was a piece of paper, headed with the

[Shi 'hou]

sheikh's name and address in Arabic, and a statement in the same language to the effect that the bearer had his permission to travel through Oman without let or hindrance. It also offered dire penalties, including the amputation of the right hand, to any who dared to show violence to the bearer. Unfolding this rather dirty piece of paper I handed it to the headman. He held it gingerly in his fingers, gazing at it suspiciously, and pretended to read it although it was upside down. With a shrug he then handed it to another tribesman, but this man could make nothing of the document either.

Although they could not understand Arabic script, I think they must have had some inkling of its meaning, for they began a violent altercation amongst themselves. One of them suddenly pointed in the direction of Ras-al-Khaimah, and then at us. Beginning to get rather tired of all this pantomime, I decided to take decisive measures. There is a rule in the desert, at least among the Bedouins, that if you are attacked you should seize the garment of the most respectable Arab and cry: '*Daheel*', which means 'protection'. Under the unwritten laws of Arab hospitality, he is obliged to keep you in safe custody for at least twenty-four hours. The principle is not unlike that obtaining in the Middle Ages, when the outlaw could enter a church and claim sanctuary from the clergy.

I had no idea how it would work with the *Shi'hou*, but I was determined to try. Dashing forward I seized the scanty hem of the headman's *kufiyeh* and yelled '*Daheel*' at the top of my voice. To my surprise the old man's face was suddenly contorted with fear, and he stepped back as though I had struck him a blow. His rapid action resulted in a piece of the rotten cloth coming away in my hands and he was left almost naked. The effect of his predicament on the other *Shi'hou* was astonishing. At first amazement, then amusement, was written on their faces. Some grinned widely, others burst into shrieks of laughter. Even the headman, who had covered up his bare limbs as best he could with a few shreds of cloth, was grinning sheepishly. All signs of hostility had vanished. With a gesture the headman beckoned us towards the hut from which the shrieking woman had emerged.

Closely followed by a still laughing bodyguard, we marched towards the hut. The headman entered first, directing us to follow him. It was dark and dirty inside as well as hot and foul-smelling. Our hosts squatted on the bare floor in a circle, which we joined.